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RESTORATION REVIEW

I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom, and that of all about me, seemed insufficient for the day.

—Abraham Lincoln

I do not doubt but that genuine piety is the spring on peace of mind: it enables us to bear the sorrows of life, and lessens the pangs of death: the same cannot be said of hypocrisy.

—Jean de La Bruyere

Vol. 24, No. 3 Leroy Garrett, Editor March, 1982

Jesus Today . . .

JESUS AND MAN-MADE RULES

You have a clever way of rejecting God's law in order to uphold your own teaching. — Mk. 7:9

That stinging rebuke may apply to some of us in the church today as it did to the Pharisees. We may be rejecting God's law even when we take our material "right out of the Bible," for, like the Pharisees, we may be guilty of abusing the Scriptures in order to uphold the teaching of our particular group. Jesus recognized that people can be quite clever in this sort of thing. They can "have Bible" for all they say and yet be wrong, not because they are sincerely mistaken in their understanding, but because they use the Scriptures for their own selfish purposes. Jesus labeled this hypocrisy, and none of us is to suppose that he is above a hypocritical use of the Bible.

At the heart of Jesus' quarrel with the Pharisees is that they made rules for God: *It is no use for them to worship me, because they teach man-made rules as though they were my laws* (Mk. 7:7). This is the essence of legalism, making laws where God has made none, and this seems to be as much of an insult to the Fahter as defying a law He has made. In either case it is one's self or his party that is being worshipped, not God.

The confrontation with the Pharisees about worship raises the question of the nature of worship. It is evident that worship *per se* is not what is said or done, for "These people honor me with their words," Jesus said, quoting the prophet Isaiah, "but their heart is really far away from me." So we can sing, pray, and praise all day and not be worshiping. We can kneel, genuflect, and do all sorts of ritual, including the breaking of bread and putting money in a plate, and still not be worshiping. This is evident from Is. 1:12-14, which may well be the most explosive language in Scripture: "Who asked you to bring me all this when you come to worship me? Who asked you to do all this tramping around in my Temple? It's useless to bring your offerings. I am disgusted with the smell of the incense you burn. I cannot stand your New Moon Festivals, your Sabbaths, and your religious gatherings; they are all corrupted by your sins. I hate your New Moon Festivals and holy days; they are a burden that I am tired of bearing."

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It is evident that it is our hearts that the Father desires, and He will accept the external things only as they express worshipful hearts.

We must therefore be wrong to suppose that a musical instrument can "corrupt the worship," unless the instrument somehow affected one's heart. It may also be amiss to refer to "acts of worship," as if making a checklist of what God accepts and does not, or to measure a church's loyalty by whether it follows "the five acts of public worship." Here we have man-made rules, and in the very area where Jesus points to the danger of such rules separating us from God. Worship is thus an attitude of heart, which may or may not express itself in such acts as prayer and song. In Rom. 12:1 Paul makes the commitment of the whole of one's life the real worship: "Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him. This is the true worship that you should offer."

Worship therefore does not begin and end at certain hours, nor is it measured by certain defined acts. To worship "in spirit and in truth," as Jn. 4:24 urges, is therefore an appeal to reverence God in heart and mind, not by going to the right mountain or checking out the right "worship service."

Those who claim to have restored "the worship of the New Testament" have come up with a lot of man-made rules, some of them being a bit ludicrous. A visiting brother may be allowed to say something about his youth camp, but we tack it on the end so that it will not be "part of the worship." And some churches are fussy about announcements being made "part of the worship." The most amusing rule of all is that the visiting college choir must wait until "after we have dismissed with the worship" before it can sing to the assembly, for that is entertainment and not worship! The truth is that entertainment may be one of the most important expressions of our worship-filled lives, especially frolicing with the kids at the park!

The most revealing rules of all are those that control "the sanctuary," which is where *worship* takes place at certain times, giving that place in the building a certain sanctity! The kids are urged to be quiet as they approach that room, and adults know to be worshipful. But is not what we do in the foyer and the halls, greeting and enjoying one another, also worship?

The danger with all such rule-making is that we deceive ourselves into supposing that *we* worship right, while others who do not follow the same prescriptions and the same acts do not. We learn from the Pharisees that we can be very religious, very proper, and very right, and yet *very wrong*, even when we have all the externals in proper order. In judging the validity of other people's worship we may fail to see the truth of Psa. 51:17: "My sacrifice is a humble spirit, O God; you will not reject a humble and

repentant heart." True worship is inward, inspired by the Spirit of God in the spirit of man.

Another evil of man-made rules is that things of lesser importance are given top priority. The story in Mk. 7 begins with some of the Pharisees and lawyers, lately come from Jerusalem (probably to check on Jesus), gathered around the Christ. Their interest was not in the good works he was doing, and they cared little about all the people he had blessed. He was neglecting the rules they had made, which they identified as those "handed down by our ancestors." Jesus' disciples were not washing their hands before eating like the Pharisees did. This is all they could see. Their traditions or man-made rules caused them to miss the greatest event in human history, unfolding before their very eyes. What a tragedy!

It can and does happen to us all. When some of us receive reports of a great conversion victory, we think only of whether the converts were baptized according to our practice. We discount the great work of some church because it is not our kind of church. And if one does not teach the Scriptures precisely the way do, we say "He is not of us" and write him off. Even when Jesus did not write folk off so readily.

It is ironic, the Pharisees gathered around Jesus the way they were. They were in the very presence of the Son of God, but they saw only what their traditions allowed them to see. It should give us pause to ask what we would have seen had we been in the company of Jesus. Would we have missed the point by emphasizing the superficial?

It is true that if the worship of God is to be true worship it must be according to knowledge. To worship God we must know Him, and so we must apply our minds to His disclosure of Himself in Scripture. But it is easy for us to make party rules by the way we handle His word, and what we call "going by the Bible" is often only our sectarian interpretation. A knowledge of God is centered in the great truths that He has revealed about Himself — His holiness, His perfection, His philanthropy. When we come into His presence realizing His holiness we are worshiping "in spirit and in truth." To speak glibly of God and to worship Him as a matter of habit only reveals our ignorance of His true character. We have heart-worship when we understand, only as frail human beings can, His great philanthropy. His mercy is so great that He bends down from heaven to help us as one would a little child. He teaches us how to respond to His love so that we might be forgiven.

That response is worship, and it is reflected in all that we experience and all that we are and all that we ever hope to be.

This prayer by that delightful Anglican, John Baillie, serves to point to the broader parameters of the worship of God.

O Thou who hast so graciously called me to be Thy servant, I would hold myself in readiness today for thy least word of command. Give me the spirit, I pray Thee, to keep myself in continual training for the punctual fulfillment of Thy most holy will.

Let me keep the edges of my mind keen:
Let me keep my thinking straight and true:
Let me keep my passions in control:
Let me keep my will active:
Let me keep my body fit and healthy:
Let me remember Him whose meat it was to do the will of Him who sent Him.

Worship is thus practicing the presence of God in all of life's ventures. — *the Editor*

A BUMPER STICKER: JESUS AND THE COWBOYS

It was really two bumper stickers, side by side. One assured the reader that it was Jesus that made the difference, presumably in the life of the driver of the car. It was a dubious testimony, I thought, for those who see the sticker will not likely have opportunity to witness any change in the life of the driver, except in the way he behaves in traffic. And we all know that great changes could be wrought on our streets and highways, especially in Texas! Even so, I identified with what the sticker had to say, for Jesus *does* make all the difference in the world in one's life, if he is allowed to. It is the sticker that reads *Honk if you love Jesus!* that turns me off. To me that is cheap vaudeville, however well intended. Really, I don't think we have to put our Lord on bumper stickers, however appropriate the words may seem. It is enough when his love and glory flow from our hearts!

Alongside the sticker advertising Jesus was one honoring the Cowboys — the *Dallas* Cowboys, of course, who else? Jesus and the Cowboys! The driver was letting all of us know what he stood for, or what he loved, or what got a lot of his time and money. Since Jesus was to the left of the Cowboys, we may presume that Jesus comes first, with the Cowboys a close second. Maybe!

It has been of interest to me to observe how churches handle "Super Bowl Sunday" or any Sunday during football season, especially in Cowboy country. Some churches become very pragmatic for about 20 Sundays out of the year. A Presbyterian church in Dallas has a special "Cowboy Service," which meets early enough to get everyone to the game on time. Other churches, including some Churches of Christ, have been known to

adjust their evening service to fit the Cowboy schedule, with some even daring to forget about church on Sunday night when Dallas is playing a big game. The more "faithful" ones defy the schedule and have service at the very hour Dallas is playing Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, or San Francisco.

The loyal Cowboy fans who place their Jesus bumper stickers to the *left* of the Cowboy sticker are dutifully in church, those at least with guiltier consciences, having arrived at church at the very last minute and having seen the first quarter or so on TV and having heard a few minutes more of it on the way to church on the car radio. They can hardly wait for the last Amen to find out how the big game turned out. It is really no way to treat good Christians. I have thought of how delightfully surprised they would be if when they got to church they were treated to a giant screen presentation on what was on their minds and hearts. Surely that is what Jesus would do if he were running the show.

One preacher who has to cope with Cowboy competition for almost half the Sunday nights of the year has come up with an admirable device. He records the games on his TV set, then invites the congregation to his home afterwards to see the playback. How is that for putting Jesus first and the Cowboys second!

There are of course the plain old sinful folk who "forsake the assembly" on Sunday night and do what they really want to do. Such ones will have to answer to St. Peter or to the angel Gabriel or somebody, maybe even the elders, for their conduct, and that includes the elders that also stay home to watch the Cowboys on TV.

On last "Super Bowl Sunday" I was a guest at First Christian Church in Johnson City, Tn., having spent the previous week teaching at Emmanuel School of Religion. I was scheduled as the guest speaker for that evening, at the same hour as the Super Bowl. The minister announced that morning that I was to be the speaker for the evening service and that he wanted all of them there to hear me. Referring to the big game, which is admittedly tough competition, he reminded them that every play of any consequence would be repeated again and again for days to come, so they should consider being at church. I appreciated the honest, matter-of-fact way he handled it.

That evening we had a fine turnout and I made a special effort to make it worth each one's while, speaking as I did on, *You're Not OK and I'm Not OK, but That's OK!*, which was my synopsis of the book of Romans. That night, Super Bowl night, I received a super compliment. "I am a football coach," one brother said to me, "and I confess that it was hard for me to leave that game to come to church, but you really made it worth my while, and I'm glad I came." Once back home in Texas I passed that along to Ouida as the superest compliment I ever received! But she wanted to know if she was included in those that are not OK, and I

assured her that she was not, that of all the human race she is the one exception.

So one way to handle the Cowboy competition is to do them one better by having programs that pull people away from their TV sets, which is of course easier said than done. I am reminded of a Church of Christ in Houston that has Sunday Night Alive every weekend. If it is alive enough that ought to be the answer.

I am sort of having fun, for the problem really goes deeper than I am making it, does it not? It may be a matter of divided loyalties or of serving God and mammon, or something like that. If our minds really matter then it matters what they dwell upon. It is a question of whether we have really moved inside such truths as: "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rom. 12:2). Those "with minds set on earthly things" (Philip. 3:19) concerned the apostle and were seen as apart from those whose citizenship is in heaven.

I suppose a Christian can well have interest in skiing, skindiving, bridge, jogging, the movies, golf, TV, and yes, the Cowboys, or some of these things. But one better take heed when such things become life itself. "For me to live is_____". The real Christian, like Paul, is unequivocal as to how the blank is to be filled in. If Jesus is at the center of our lives and if he rules in our hearts as Lord, then all other concerns are brought into captivity for him. I am persuaded that when this truth becomes a reality in our lives that we simply will not have much interest or much time for a lot of things that now consume us.

I have no quarrel with a brother who puts a Cowboy sticker on his bumper if he has Jesus in his heart. 'Tis better, much better, for Jesus to be in his heart than on his bumper. And it really isn't important where the Cowboys are. Tell it in Texas! Proclaim it in Dallas! — *the Editor*

J. FRANK NORRIS: CAMPBELLITE

Flamboyant and controversial, J. Frank Norris, an independent Baptist of yesteryear with big churches in Fort Worth and Detroit, was cut from a large mold. While I was but a lad when he was in his heyday, I remember some of the stories about his colorful and stormy career. They told it on him that he would sometimes have the ushers to lock the doors and allow no one to leave the church until they had given the amount of money he asked for. And he once shot a man to death in his church, apparently in self defense. He was at war with the Southern Baptists as much as with the devil, so he had his own brand of Baptist church. He must have been

powerful in the pulpit, for he was known to bring 4,000 people to their feet as one man, praising God, and he often moved audiences to tears.

He touched the history of Churches of Christ in Texas in what may well have been the most famous debate in this state, with Foy E. Wallace, Jr., who was as colorful a figure among Churches of Christ as Norris was among the Baptists. The Norris-Wallace debate, which was held at the First Baptist Church in Fort Worth in 1934, attracted 7,000 to 8,000 people for each of the three days it was held, with almost as many attending the day sessions as the evening ones.

It had its amusing moments, such as Norris accusing Wallace of sprinkling folk when he accidentally turned a glass of water on a man sitting near him. But it was more often visceral, with feelings running deep and Baptist and Church of Christ folk, who usually make good neighbors even in Texas, more polarized than ever. Wallace resembled a prosecuting attorney, sometimes shaking his finger in Norris' face as he made his points.

Norris had the debate stenographically recorded and was going to publish it in its entirety, but Wallace went to court and got an injunction prohibiting Norris from publishing Wallace's part of the debate. Norris went ahead and published the *Norris-Wallace Debate*, which was only his speeches, but since there are copious quotes from what Wallace had said, one gets some idea of the line of argument. Norris took full advantage of Wallace's refusal: *Read the debate that so thoroughly annihilated the opponent that he refused to have his side published,* was part of Norris' advertisement of the debate.

One is left to wonder why Wallace refused, for he was given the right to check his speeches and make corrections, and he was offered half the profits from the sale of the book. Limited as we are to what Norris published, we can make no judgment on this matter. But it is clear that Norris believed that it was to his advantage to publish the debate, including Wallace's side, and one must conclude that he handled his part quite well on all four propositions, two of which were on premillennialism, the others on eternal security and the essentiality of baptism.

What especially intrigued me, being the Campbellite that I am, is the way Norris used Alexander Campbell to his advantage, even to putting the audience in gales of laughter. He showed quite convincingly that Campbell believed in a millennium, in the future conversion of the Jews, and a thousand year reign. As for baptism being essential, he really laid it on Wallace again and again: "I challenge him to show one line, statement, syllable, address, sermon, where Alexander Campbell ever wrote or spoke, or preached that baptism is essential to salvation." Campbell in fact went

on record to the effect that he could *not* say baptism is absolutely essential. Norris insisted that Wallace and his folk should not be called Campbellites. **I am a Campbellite**, proclaimed J. Frank Norris, clearly in charge of the situation. The audience roared!

Norris was devastating on what has long been the Achilles' heel of Churches of Christ, exclusivism or supposing only themselves to be saved and all others lost, which was particularly manifest during the first half of this century. "Is it not a fact that you teach, preach, and practice that all who are not baptized into your particular 'Church of Christ' have no chance of heaven?," Norris asked. He then gave a roll call of some of the great saints who have gone on to their reward — Wesley, Moody, Spurgeon. They are all in hell, along with millions of other evangelical Christians who were not baptized according to Wallace's understanding, he charged. And that includes Alexander Campbell, he added, who was never immersed in or by the 'Church of Christ.'

As interesting as this old debate is, staged by remarkably colorful preachers, it is just as well that those days are behind us. I would that all remnants of the "skin the sects" days were discarded, but we are not yet completely liberated from our narrow sectarian exclusivism. Shades of the Foy Wallace era are still with us, so long as we presume to be so "right" that we cannot have fellowship with other believers.

The truth is that we should never have debated the Baptists, nor any other Christian group for that matter. Add up all the debates and what do we have in terms of brotherhood among believers. Absolutely nothing! We were born as a movement with a passion for unity, our pioneers assured us, but debates not only cultivate no unity, they are Satan's tool to divide us further.

And the propositions debated have often been unnecessary if not silly. When Wallace affirmed that "baptism is essential to salvation" he took a very vulnerable position, one that the best minds throughout our history have refused to take — mainly because the Bible nowhere teaches that baptism is essential to salvation! And why gather 8,000 people together and argue about the millennium, a doctrine on which the church has always differed, usually without difficulty. As for the issue of whether a believer can fall from grace, an "outsider" might have concluded from watching the spectacle that both parties fairly demonstrated that even 8,000 believers might fall from grace together, for the Baptists and Church of Christ folk spent the better part of three days laughing at each other as each urged his champion to get with it, not unlike a rooster fight.

Fancy with me for a moment. We go back in our minds to the First Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas in 1934. There is a great

gathering of 8,000 Christians, mostly Baptist and Church of Christ folk, and they are having a festival of preaching and fellowship. Great singing! Great praise! Their love for each other is evident. Two of their great preachers, J. Frank Norris and Foy E. Wallace, are sharing the pulpit together. Together they are preaching Jesus Christ and him crucified. They are aware that they have some differences, but on this occasion they are emphasizing their commonality in Jesus Christ, and the two churches are bearing witness to the people of Fort Worth of how Christians can differ and still love each other and do something constructive together.

Down deep inside your heart do not you want *that* kind of Church of Christ, one that reaches out to embrace with loving fellowship rather than one that shakes a finger in a fratricidal spectacle? The choice is really ours to make. Don't you think there has been enough hating and debating?

As for Alexander Campbell, he received word while on his death bed that his folk and the Baptists were trying to unite. The old man wept for joy, saying, "This is the happiest day of my life," and went on to say that the Disciples and Baptists should never have separated.

That is one more reason why I am a Campbellite — along with J. Frank Norris! — *the Editor*

WITH THE EPISCOPALIANS

My dear Ouida says she likes the way the Episcopalians bury their dead, for it is mostly praise, prayer, and readings from the Scriptures. As one enters the chapel she is given a copy of "The Burial of the Dead"* taken from the ancient Book of Common Prayer. The service opens with the solemn procession. As the congregation stands in respect for the deceased, the rector reads, "I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

There is then a collect or prayer in behalf of the deceased in which the person's name is used: "O God, whose mercies cannot be numbered: Accept our prayers on behalf of thy servant (N)_____, and grant him an entrance into the land of light and joy, in the fellowship of thy saints, and bring us all to thy heavenly kingdom."

With the congregation seated there follows rather extensive readings from the Scriptures and the apocrypha. Then there are responsive readings. This was followed by brief remarks by the pastor relative to the deceased and words of comfort to the family, all done rather informally, even jovially. I was surprised that the rector ventured to describe the deceased as "irascible" — with good humor of course. Knowing the deceased as well as I did, I heartily agreed with his description, though I refrained from saying *Amen.*

Even though the rector and his assistant were in full clerical regalia, with a cross born down the aisle toward the altar during the solemn procession, it was a "low church" Episcopal service, so there was no mass for the dead. And since our departed friend gave his body to a medical school, it was more of a memorial service than a funeral.

Since Ouida and I had attended the old gentleman somewhat in his latter years, the relatives asked if I might say something at his memorial. I was impressed that the rector urged me to do more than eulogize the deceased, but to bear witness for the Christian faith. "We have a message to give," he said to me with a sense of urgency, "and I think we make a mistake in not giving it at a time like this."

I was also impressed with the way he introduced me to those that had gathered. I was a close friend to the deceased and "a minister of the church." *A minister of the church!* Never mind about this sect or that denomination, I was simply a servant of Christ and his church. While the reference to *the church* would please many Church of Christ folk, interpreting the term as they often do, it is certain that the rector was speaking of the church catholic.

On the way home Ouida was commending the spiritual depth of the Episcopal service while I was praising the openness of the rector. "They are less sectarian than we are," I said to her, and we wondered how it would be if the situation were reversed, with the relatives requesting that an Episcopal priest be invited to take part in a service at a typical Church of Christ. We concluded that one would have to be both daring and naive to make such a request! And the Episcopal priest would have to be even more daring! And it would be an unusual Church of Christ minister that would urge him to bear witness to his faith and introduce him as "a minister of the church."

Ah, if we could all come to see the beauty and the appropriateness of being simply *the church.* We are all His church, His Body, the Body of Christ, all who believe in Christ and "habitually obey him," as Alexander Campbell liked to put it. We are His church not because of our sects and denominations but in spite of them.

It is my prayer that our folk in Churches of Christ-Christian Churches will come to see *the church* more like that Episcopal priest sees it and as Thomas Campbell saw it — as consisting of all those who profess faith in Christ and obey him according to their understanding. What we call the Church of Christ or the Christian Church is no more *the church* than the Episcopal Church is, or any other denomination. The church of Jesus

Christ transcends all denominations. It existed upon this earth before there was ever a denomination, and when all sects and parties have had their day and exist no more, the church will still be the pillar and ground of God's truth. — *the Editor*

ONE DAY FROM THE PAST

Robert Meyers

The man repeated his question, staring at me incredulously. "Do you mean to say that every person who is not in your church will go to hell?"

"That's what the Bible teaches," I said easily, condifent that I had mastered all the shibboleths and proof-texts of my tribe.

"And that includes every human being who ever lived on the earth?" He asked, his voice rising in disbelief and annoyance.

"The Bible says that the way is narrow and few will find it," I said, feeling a little guilty over the twinge of regret I had for the uncountable millions who had lived and died outside my church.

The gray-haired man, whom I had met at the door of the church as people were walking away from the service, looked at me as if he could not believe what he saw. His face was used to being composed and tolerant, but now the eyes were squinted quizzically and the lips were pressed tightly with the force of his effort to restrain himself. He looked at me for half a minute, blocking the exit for those few still left in the building.

"You really believe that?" he asked, and seeing his answer in my face he breathed in genuine horror, "My God!"

I was 17 years old and had already been preaching for two years. I was naturally glib and had not much fear of audiences in my vast ignorance of my ignorance. Armed with texts and the sermon outlines of older preachers, I had been preaching every Sunday in little congregations around my home. People had pampered me, as they do young boys with a religious bent, and the result was that I was already armored in complacency. I had just finished a sermon on the one-and-only true church and had gone to the rear of the building to be praised by each passing member. It was then that the stranger had asked me his questions.

I looked after him, only a little shaken. It was true that no one had ever before questioned what I said. This was disturbingly different. But so secure was I in my prooftext armor that I knew that if I could just get this man alone I could slice him to pieces with the sword of the Spirit.

Much later I learned that he was a professor of history in the state university, but this meant little to me at the time. I would have dismissed him by saying he was spoiled by "too much reading" and blinded by worship of the intellect. I would have told him that he needed to study the Scriptures humbly. It was to be a full twenty years before I would understand the full force of his stunned remark, "My God!"

If anyone does not understand what I am doing, I will gladly tell. I am putting a ghost to rest. Surely some readers of this magazine know the shudders that come over a man sometimes when he recalls things he once said and did, long ago, in the name of Christ. So tonight, as I write this, I seek to quiet the ghost of this moment of most shameful arrogance. I only wish it were possible to talk again to all those people who did *not* question me, but blindly accepted what I said to them as precious truth. It would be healing to the spirit to be able to say to them that I know now the full measure of my ignorance and my arrogance. I can only hope that they paid less attention to it than I may have thought they did. Perhaps people have ingrained common sense which saves from what many boy preachers do — *Wichita State U., Wichita 67208*

MYTHS OF THE RESTORATION MOVEMENT (2)

By W. Carl Ketcherside

One definition of the word myth has always intrigued me. A myth is "a legend embodying the convictions of a people as to their own origin and early history and the heroes connected with it." And since I am writing about myths of the restoration movement I might as well begin with the biggest one first. It would be a tragedy to get equipped to go out and hunt whales and end up seining minnows. But let me first clear away a little matter which might leave a false impression.

I am speaking about *the* restoration movement as if it were the only one ever hatched out in the fertile minds of men. Actually I should be speaking of *a* restoration movement. As any student of church history knows there have always been such movements from the third century on. Our own is but one of sixteen which were launched in the fifty years immediately following the American Revolution. Many of the others were German or Dutch in their origin. Ours was the only one of Scotch-Irish descent, which may have something to do with its popularity with us. We do not speak German. Some of them still survive; others have expired. All of them had as their goal the unity of all Christians by a return to the apostolic pattern for the church. And all of them had two other things in common. They all exploded into fragements and splinters and they all spoke of their own as *the* restoration movement.

Each movement was composed of those who thought that the blueprint for it originated in heaven. I well remember some of our old-time

brethren who were high on prophecy. They would lecture on the Book of Revelation so graphically that your hair stood up like you had stuck your finger in an electric socket, and you were afraid to walk home from the meeting in the dark. If someone had yelled "Boo!" at you, you'd have been running yet. They always located the restoration movement in Revelation 14:6. It came after the origin of the Protestant sects. John said: I saw an angel fly in the midst of the heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to them that dwell on the earth." At first some of them designated Thomas Campbell as the angel until they found out that he dipped snuff all of his life. He quickly fell from heaven.

When I learned that all groups who thought they were the subject of divine prophecy - including the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Seventh Day Adventists — had their own angels, I wanted to sue them for fraud and for obtaining money under false pretense. Gradually, I came to see that all are caught in the same trap. That does not mean that all are equal in credibility. I am not talking about credibility. But it does mean that every movement started by men follow the same human tendency of reading that movement back into the sacred volume. But there has never been an indication that God is as interested in any movement as those who join it and become zealots for it.

As I view it, the greatest error in our history (and there have been three of major proportions), is the brainwashing of ourselves into believing that a movement which began in the early nineteenth century was suddenly and miraculously transmuted into the kingdom of heaven, to the utter exclusion of every other sincere believer in Jesus Christ who was not a member of such a movement. This did a number of things which severed us completely from thoughtful people who could not buy our thinking. Let us look at a few of them.

It wiped out seventeen hundred years of struggle as of no consequence at all. It negated other attempts at restoration which literally cost the lives of thousands of persons. Actually, it is questionable whether some members of "The Church of Christ" believe anyone was saved from the death of John the apostle to the birth of Thomas Campbell. I am thinking just now of Peter de Bruys of Provence, of whom it was said, "He made the most laudable attempts to reform the abuses and to remove the superstitions that disfigured the beautiful simplicity of the gospel." That was in 1110. After preaching such reform for 20 years he was burnt at the stake at St. Giles's in 1130.

Incidentally some of the things he urged upon his followers were: 1. That no persons whatever be baptized before they were come to the full use of their reason. 2. That it was an idle superstition to build churches for the service of God, who will accept of a sincere worship wherever it is offered. 3. That the crucifixes used as instruments of superstition deserved

to be pulled down and destroyed. 4. That the real body and blood of Christ were not exhibited in the eucharist; but were merely represented in that holy ordinance, by their figures and symbols. 5. And lastly, that the oblations, prayers, and good works of the living, could be in no respect advantageous to the dead.

I call that pretty good thinking for one who preceded Martin Luther by 400 years and Thomas Campbell by 800 years, and who never attended one of our Christian colleges. I look forward to meeting Peter de Bruys in heaven along with a host of others such as Huss, Latimer, Ridley, and a whole catalog of those courageous souls who qualified for inclusion in Foxe's Book of Martyrs. I think Jesus meant what he said when he declared, "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." I will count myself honored to stand among those who watched their flesh shrivel to a blackened cinder because of their supreme faith in him. That is, if I make it!

Alexander Campbell wrote in 1837: "If there be no Christians among the Protestant sects, there are certainly none among the Romanists, none among the Jews, Turks, Pagans, and therefore no Christians in the world except ourselves, or such of us as keep, or strive to keep, all of the commandments of Jesus. Therefore, for many centuries there has been no church of Christ, no Christians in the world; and the promises concerning the *everlasting* kingdom of Messiah have failed; and the gates of hell have prevailed against his church. This cannot be; and therefore there are Christians among the sects." I concur with this. We have confused "THE CHURCH OF CHRIST" with the body of Christ, the family of God. This is the very essence of sectarianism. If not, why not?

We know when the restoration movement began. We know who began it. And we know why it was begun. It is too young to be the church which Jesus built and too old to be the sect it has become. We have tried to make it identical with the church by resorting to childish and inane subterfuges. One of the most absurd and asinine is the chiseling on the cornerstones of modern church buildings, which were themselves unknown to the new covenant scriptures — Established 33 A.D. We have fooled no one but ourselves. Some of our religious neighbors have gnashed their teeth while others have laughed up their sleeves at such puerile effrontery.

In doing this we have not been thinking of the organism given life of the Spirit and set in motion upon the day of Pentecost. There is no proof of the fact that God ever started anything like we build upon such cornerstones. But we have sought to distinguish ourselves from every other believer in the neighborhood, all of which we conclude started later than we did. We have a direct chain leading back to the beginning, others have shorter chains tying them to some event in history which originated them. It is a travesty upon God's blessed word to see the words engraved upon

three cornerstones in the same town, where the members built upon those cornerstones have nothing to do with each other, and will not even speak to one another when they meet in the post office.

Do we not tend to confuse the world by such tactics? Do we not leave them thinking that Christ is divided? We send missionaries into towns where the good news has been preached for a century and the first thing they do is to call together a dozen people who share in their peculiarities and place upon the cornerstone where they meet — Established 33 A.D. As one old brother said, "What they represent may have been started then but this place was established last March after a big row in the Baptist Church."

Concerning Christian Churches and Churches of Christ. . .

FREE FROM SECTARIANISM

Cecil Hook

While living in the friendly little city of Lovington, New Mexico a few years ago, I developed a relaxed relationship with L. S. "Manny" Loveall, a minister of the Christian Church there. Manny and I were able to discuss matters more objectively without each feeling that he was bound to protect his party loyalty.

I noticed that Manny had a set of Jule Miller filmstrips like the ones that I used at times to teach a prospect. As we compared our teaching and methods, we learned that we each baptized persons upon the prerequisite of confession of faith in Christ and repentance from sins. We each taught the prospect that he would be baptized into Christ, for the remission of sins, into the one body which is the church which is not a denomination. We would explain that this would make him simply a Christian. We agreed that teaching on issues like the use of instrumental music was not a part of the conversion process.

Then we mused about the perplexing result of our similar actions. When he baptized a person into Christ and his church, it automatically made that person a member of the Christian Church. When I baptized a person into Christ and his church, it automatically made that person a member of the Church of Christ. The process was the same in both cases.

What, then, made the difference in the results? Why would one of us produce the Church of Christ and the other produce the Christian Church?

One possible explanation would be that the person who did the baptizing made the difference. But how could that be? The convert's salvation was based on his own belief and obedience, not that of the baptizer. And it is the Lord who does the adding, not the preacher.

Another answer — and the correct one — is that the Lord did not add these converts to the Church of Christ and/or the Christian Church. He added them to his one church. The Spirit directed their baptism into the one body (1 Cor. 12:13). There is only one.

When these converts chose to be in fellowship with the Christian Church or the Church of Christ, they chose to be a part of a sect. In these two groups, persons have all been baptized into the one body, the church. Then they distinguish themselves from the one body and from one another by wearing distinguishing names. To name is to denominate; to denominate is to name. The Lord gave no name for his church. Now, they have become sectarian denominations! Each group is a part of the whole church but not in fellowship with the whole. They are sectarian divisions.

My brothers in Christ, what other answer can you put forth? This answer has not come to me easily. It was born in pain — in the anguish of facing disturbing truth with intellectual honesty.

Perhaps you hold to the objection that the Church of Christ has a scriptural name and the Christian Church doesn't. That's an evasion. The difference in those names is less than the difference in tweedle-dee and tweedle-dum. One is the Church "of Christ" and the other is the "of Christ" Church.

The real point is that they are distinguishing, exclusive names, and God did not intend that we distinguish and he gave us no distinguishing name.

These two groups do not have to merge into one congregation. They should each designate themselves simply as the church and, as such, they should rejoice that they are in fellowship in Christ. They have differing scruples, but neither judges or disdains the other any longer. They are one body but two congregations. It is not the meeting in one congregation nor having identical convictions that make them one. It is being in Christ that makes them one. Churches are not in/out of fellowship with each other. That is an individual relationship accomplished when we are baptized into Christ, whether baptized by Manny Loveall or Cecil Hook or any other sectarian.

To be free in Christ, we must be free of sectarian spirit and practice.
— *The Church of Christ in New Braunfels (Texas)*

OUR CHANGING WORLD

Churches of Christ are nearly always identified by the town they are in or by their location, such as Argyle Church of Christ or Sixth and Izzard Church of Christ, or perhaps Southside or Sunset, but almost never by a person or idea as with other churches, such as Scofield Memorial or Calvary Baptist. An exception is the Beacon Church of Christ near Mabank, Texas. A recent news item reveals that "The name Beacon was chosen because it was the avowed intent of this gorup to be a light in their community." Starting with 14 in 1975 they now number 150, and they are widely respected in their area for their benevolent work. Their minister, Dalton Porter, was named citizen of the year of Mabank, due largely to his leadership in humanitarian causes. This church, which now has a new building, has also taken the lead in doing what Churches of Christ almost never do in having an ordination service for the installation of its elders. I was honored to serve the congregation in assisting in this beautiful service.

Thus far 168 tons of food have been sent by Churches of Christ to some 20 of their churches in Poland, with another 50 truckloads due to be sent this spring. While the food is delivered to Churches of Christ in Poland, distribution is made to needy people generally. With the White's Ferry Road church in Monroe, La. taking the lead, the intention is to send 20 tons of food each month. If you wish to be part of this, the address is Box 2000, West Monroe, La. 71291.

Gospel Services, Inc. recently attempted to get a count on how many are being baptized by Churches of Christ. While only one in eight churches responded, 1,328 churches reported 30,621 baptisms during 1981. It is estimated that the average church is batpizing 5% of the number of its membership each year. It is not clear how this relates to the general decrease in growth among Churches of Christ in recent years. The most impressive report comes from Jimmie Lovell, who tells of 28,081 baptisms through his missionary efforts in the World Bible School during 1981.

Churches of Christ will have a booth at the 1982 World's Fair in Knoxville where 11 million visitors are expected. The theme of the exhibit will be "Energy for Life: God's Love . . . . Person to Person," which will have prime space in the Technology and Life-Styles Pavilion. The Fair opens May 1 and continues through October.

Our folk owe a great debt to Dr. James C. Dobson and his film series *Focus on the Family*, for they have taught us a practical lesson as to the meaning of fellowship. Dr. Dobson has taught in scores of Churches of Christ by way of his film series, and he has been advertised in the pages of our journals. This shows that we can share with other Christians (Dr. Dobson is not a member of the Church of Christ) and have them teach in our churches without endorsing everything about them. Surely if the doctor can teach us by video in our assemblies, he could be invited to appear personally. This is one of our first big steps away from our deep-seated exclusivism, and we can all rejoice. Thank God that no one has trotted out the old bromide that we are having fellowship with a "false teacher." God is liberating us, step by step!

A student at one of our schools of preaching writes that he is doing a thesis to the effect that Churches of Christ "are no longer willing to condemn others nor refuse to extend fellowship to others simply because they differe with us on this one subject," referring to instrumental music. I agreed with him that this was the *trend*, though we had not yet actually arrived at the place where we accept our sisters and brothers in the Christian Church, for the music question is still made a test of fellowship. Many of our leaders believe that the instrument should not be made a test, but they will not speak out clearly. They are waiting for a more convenient season, which will come, with the rank and file demanding it.

BOOK NOTES

If you are interested in a serious study of evangelical theology where there is commitment to Biblical faith and where Jesus is uncompromisingly presented as alive and real, we recommend Helmut Thielicke's *The Evangelical Faith,* now in three volumes. You might start with the newest one, Vol. 3, which is on The Holy Spirit, the Church, and Eschatology, which is probably the most useful of the volumes to most of us. If you have never made a systematic study of the great Biblical themes, this would be a good place to start, for Thielicke, now retired from the University of Hamburg, Germany, is one of the most readable of modern theologians. This Vol. 3, just off the press, is a handsome hardback of nearly 500 pages. 22.95 postpaid.

You have probably heard J. Vernon McGee on the radio. His splendid Bible teaching, which is both simple and practical, is now available in paperbacks. *Ruth: The Romance of Redemption* and *Esther: The Romance of Providence* are delightfully warm and informative. They are 5.50 each, postpaid.

While no longer new, we continue to recommend the books by John R. W. Stott. We stock our three favorites, which will become your favorites once you read them. *Basic Christianity* (3.50), *Your Mind Matters* (2.25), *What Christ Thinks of the Church* (3.50). These are all renewal books and really strike home. The prices include postage.

Edersheim's unabridged 2-vol. set (in one volume) of *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* is again available, at 19.95 pp. This is a library within itself, one of the greatest books in religion ever published, packed with information.

Robert Mounce is coming out with a commentary on 1 & 2 Peter, entitled *A Living Hope*, at 5.50 pp. Order now and we will put it in the mail to you as soon as it is ready.

For 16.95 we will send you what we believe to be the best Bible dictionary available *The New Westminster Bible Dictionary.*

You should remember that we still have three bound volumes of this journal available, covering four years of publication. *Principles of Unity and Fellowship* (1977) and *The Ancient Order* (1978) are single volumes at 5.50 each. *Blessed Are the Peacemakers and With All the Mind* (1979-80) is a double volume at 8.50. These are handsome volumes with dustjacket and table of contents. The response to these have been so favorable that we are willing to sell them on a money-back guarantee.

Since bookkeeping has become too much of a problem, we ask you to send a check with your order, please.

READER'S EXCHANGE

The things you and brother Ketcherside advocated in the 50's concerning the preacher arrangement in the church are actually being encouraged in some prominent places today. — *Mack Rife, Richlands, Va.*

I want to say a word about infant dedication. The Sunday following the birth of our grandson, the minister took him and held him up so that all could see him. He talked about our responsibility toward the little one, both the parents and the church. He then prayed for God's blessings on our baby and on us that we might not shirk our responsibility. We know it was not necessary for him to do that, but it was a precious moment, and I know it made our kids feel their responsibility in a special kind of way. I'd like to see more of this kind of thing in our churches, for anything that shows love and caring is good. — *Russell and Rose Temple, Wallowa, Or.*

It's comforting to know there are others out there from our background who know what it means to be free in Jesus. However, it is discouraging when you see your brothers and sisters in the "party" so closed minded. You want to open their eyes spiritually but I realize only God can do that as He did with me. Then sometimes I become disappointed in myself that I find myself almost binding on them (in myself) the freedom I experience. — *Joe and Sharron Littlejohn, Wynne, Ar.*